

***Broken Homes* Brings Down the House**

by Benjamin Sutton



The home is an unstable space in contemporary art. As the arena in which boundaries between public and private, masculine and feminine, quotidian and unfamiliar, youth and adulthood are constantly being fought over, it is at once a sanctuary, vessel of selfhood and locus of innumerable anxieties. Gordon Matta-Clark gives those blurry lines very sharp definition in "Splitting" (1974), a photograph of an abandoned New Jersey house he sliced in two, its leaning halves casting a wedge-shaped shadow on the dusty, patchy yard. It's a fitting first image to encounter in *Broken Homes* (through January 22), Momenta Art's group show of artists' images of and interventions into domestic spaces.

It's also one of the most conventionally gendered works in the exhibition. We picture Matta-Clark climbing on the house's roof or scaling its façade, like Santa or a firefighter, saw in hand, cutting the passive, coded-feminine home in two. It's the kind of über-masculine performance that would put Pollock's drippy dances to shame, but it produces a surprisingly ambiguous and uncanny image. Kate Gilmore provides an apt feminist response with a likewise violent and playful domestic intervention in the rear gallery in her video "Wallflower" (2006/07). Gilmore, in dress and high heels, stands in an attic-like space, throwing the entire contents of a house (furniture, clothes, dishes, etc.) through a hole in the floor to the room below until it forms a mound down which she can climb to escape her homely purgatory. Works like Gilmore's and Matta-Clark's encourage gendered readings of domestic space, but also overlap with the class-coded representations of homes that form this show's richest line of inquiry.

Anthony Marchetti, for instance, photographs the insides of homes much like the one that Matta-Clark sliced open in Englewood, finding in one a Gilmore-like pile of furnishings left by former tenants of a now-vacant suburban house. The derelict interiors allude to the housing crisis, but also underline the expressive qualities of even the most mundane interiors. In one of the three Marchetti photos from 2009 included here, dirty marks on the living room carpet and around the places on a wall where pictures once hung evoke scars.

This suburban malaise finds its cosmopolitan cousin in works by Lisa Kirk and Peter Scott. Kirk's latest installation of her "House of Cards" (2009) was assembled out of objects found at dormant construction sites. From materials collected at these spaces of abandoned development, she creates shelters that evoke the shantytowns of developing countries. Scott's photographs juxtapose the idealized domestic interiors of billboards displayed at condo construction sites with partial views of the stalled buildings' unkempt exteriors. Both artists' works underline the intimate proximity of affluence and abject poverty.

While much of the work in *Broken Homes* engages very deliberately with this occupation-minded, foreclosure-wary moment, there are just as many pieces that mine domestic spaces' more personal

and ambivalent associations. Especially memorable among these are works by Marni Kotak and Naomi Safran-Hon. Kotak's installation near the gallery's entrance replicates her parents' South Carolina living room during a particularly fraught holiday visit in 2010. Accompanying photos and video offer an account of the disastrous visit. Whereas much of the work on view shows homes subjected to stresses engendered by outside forces, here the domestic milieu generates its own conflicts.

Safran-Hon's mixed-media works add another wrinkle to the idea of home as both an interior space and a region or state to which one's identity is bound. Her photographs of Israeli interiors are truncated by bas-relief areas of lace and cement, ornate yet rough intrusions into otherwise unremarkable domestic spaces. The hybrid images' strange trompe-l'oeil effect evokes Martha Rosler's iconic collages of modern homes inhabited by soldiers and civilians from news images of the conflict in Vietnam, though Safran-Hon's works seem more charged in their fusion of domestic spaces and military materials. Her works, like Marchetti and Kotak's, complicate the conventional gendering of domestic spaces, while examining the many other sources of pressure that might break a home.

(Images courtesy the artists, Momenta Art)